

## inside and out by leah\_btw

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Aliens, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, M/M, Physical Abuse, but minus the alien takeover, got those Host by Stephenie Meyers vibes

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Joyce Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

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**Summary:**

Billy Hargrove meets Steve Harrington in his own head. When he Hosts him for probationary purposes (i.e. Steve is an alien in Billy's head, until he isn't).

## 1. Chapter 1

Tires screeched as Billy slammed his foot against the pedal and twisted the wheel. Sirens spun in the rear view mirror and headlights blinded him in front. He swung the truck into a side street, body slamming against the door. Rocks began kicking up against the sides and Billy silently cursed the destroyed paint job. The truck wasn't his, but whoever owned it wouldn't be happy with the damage.

Billy glanced behind him; three local police cars tailed him. He grimaced, eyes back on the two track that was twisting into the forest. There was no way he was getting out of this. It was almost tempting to stop the truck and surrender. Sure, the vehicle was stolen. Sure, he beat up a cop. He was in the wrong on it, but in his defense, the guy was way out of line.

Flicking his cigarette out the window, Billy pressed the brights on. They flashed on a sign to his right. There was a bridge ahead. He was by the ravine then. He could cross, head left and hit the main road. Maybe then Billy could lose the cops, backtrack on paved backroads. Drop the truck somewhere far from home and walk back to the house. A beating from Neil would be better than anything the cops would do.

Except when the wood bridge drew up in his field of vision, and when he was halfway across, headlights and sirens flicked on. They'd rounded on him, knew where the two-track led.

And Billy was too close to the other vehicles; he spun the wheel to his right to avoid the cop car in the center of the bridge.

*Oh, shit, no—*

The guard rail came up too quickly, broke too easily. Billy wasn't wearing his seatbelt, a fact that he only realized as his body flung forward while the front of the truck crumpled on impact. The sound was awful. Metal squealed and crunched and there was shouting. Later Billy knew that was him, screaming in fear. The guard rail didn't hold. And he was falling and his stomach flew up to his throat. Arms smashed into the wheel, covering his face and glass shattered

around him, sirens still in the distance; the truck hit water in no time. It was quiet then, just his panicked breathes. Everything hurt. Was he okay? No, it all hurt. He needed to get out. The water was rising in time with his panic. What did they say to do when this happened? Billy started to crank the window down the rest of the way; his knuckles were bleeding and he tried not to notice. Water started to seep in and his breaths heaved out his lungs. The closest shore was behind him. His jeans caught while grappling out of the window, barely registered beyond a spike of panic and a kick outward. Billy swam towards the shore, swimming against the drag of the sinking truck. Black dots scattered across his vision and he knew that he'd pass out soon. He needed to reach shore first.

Rocks cut his palms as he dragged his body on the uneven beach. Coughing water out of his lungs, Billy had one minute of being thankful that he'd survived, bloody fingers gripping pebbles like they were his lifeline. Then an officer was sliding down the hill behind him, yelling at him to stay where he was. That wouldn't be a problem, officer. He was pressed onto his stomach, groaning mostly on instant before the pain of it hit him. As soon as the cuffs tightened onto his wrists, Billy's vision went black.

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"Well, son, have to say that it's not looking good for you." The judge was old, with white hair and large-framed glasses. He wore the typical black robes and look of disappointment. The documents in front of him no doubt read 'Hospitalized officer. Stole vehicle. Was pursued for thirty-minutes. Injuries sustained from accident on Garland Ravine Bridge.'

Billy himself stood alone facing the judge. Neil was at work, Susan at home, and Maxine at school. He didn't know if it looked worse that no one came to support him. If it would gain him sympathy points or make him out to be not worth anyone's time anyway.

He'd garnered three broken ribs, a broken wrist, a concussion unlike any he'd had before. Not to mention his arms were likely to scar something pretty. The doctors said he'd be out of the cast in about 6 weeks if he was lucky. The ribs would take about the same amount of time. No basketball for him for the rest of the season. If the high

school even let him return after all of this.

The judge sighed and slipped his glasses from his face. Rubbing his eyes, he said, "Now, you have two choices in this, son, and I can tell you which I like better." He looked down at his desk for a long while before looking back at Billy. He must look awful. His face was totally messed up, cuts crisscrossing everywhere, and the clothes Susan had brought for the court meeting were a size too big for him. Hair greasy and a frown the size of Texas. Billy had just turned 18. He knew the judge did not have to be lenient. "I can give you 5 years in the local jail, a sentence that would follow you for the rest of your life. Or," the judge emphasized this strongly, "you'll be assigned to Hosting Services for 6 months for a total of about 4,000 hours of community service."

Hosting Services were a contract with the Shareen, an alien community. Billy only knew what everyone else did, what the textbooks boasted. They'd made contact some twenty years prior, claiming that in exchange for a body they'd give humans knowledge on life beyond, medicine, and more. They were only light, no bigger than Billy's fist. They lacked basic understanding of how humans worked, wanted to integrate seamlessly. In comes the Hosting Services. Billy never knew anyone that had done it, knew it was bigger in cities. They offered more walks of life, a better experience for teaching a Shareen. You Hosted them. Carried them in your body and shared a consciousness with them. Responsible for teaching them how to stay alive, talking with people, not get themselves killed. Shareen were usually intelligent, didn't require an education. Billy was at the right age to Host. It wasn't really a choice, was it?

"I'll Host," his voice was like sandpaper. What he would give for a glass of water.

The judge looked pleased. "Good choice, son."

What was six months out of his life, anyway?

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They legally didn't have to tell his parents that he was Hosting. Billy requested that it remain confidential, only described it to Neil as

community service that he reported to once every two weeks. If he was going to be responsible for a literal life-form, he wasn't going to let that piece of shit know about it.

The procedure was scheduled for 9am that day and Susan was due to pick him up at noon. Billy was woken in his cell at 8am for preparation, hadn't been allowed to eat past 8pm the night before. Hadn't eat since his short hospital visit, pretended he wasn't starving. They led him to the med department where he changed into a gown. They scanned his vitals when he was done, machines whirling around him. What he would give for a shower about now. White walls and three different doctors surrounded him. Not a word was said by them. Instead a Hosting Specialist joined them.

"My name is Joyce," she said, a kind smile on her face. Billy didn't know if she was a Shareen. He thought maybe not. Paper crinkled underneath him as he shifted and shook her hand.

He knew it was pointless, but said, "Billy," all the same.

Joyce smiled wider. She looked nice, like a mom, with a plaid button down and jeans on. Billy liked that better than crisp suits. "Are you ready to hear about who you'll be Hosting?"

Billy shrugged, knew that it wouldn't make a difference who it was.

"You'll be Hosting a male Shareen, unnamed, who's perma-host is due to be complete in about six months time. He has requested family relocation when transferred to his perma-host and has requested a male Host between the ages of 17 and 21. This is all standard information. You will be expected to help fill in the gaps, Billy." Joyce paused, waiting for a response.

Billy nodded, swallowing dryly. "Yeah, can do, ma'am."

"Just Joyce, dear, please. You'll be reporting to me in person every two week in town at the Hosting Services office. By phone every week, though. I'll give you my personal line for emergencies when we're done here. Don't be afraid to call. Now," she glanced back at the door and nodded at a man in scrubs, "looks like the doctors are nearly ready, so I'll be waiting for you in the lobby to get all your

paperwork together.”

She left without preamble. The door slowly swung shut after her and suddenly Billy’s stomach flooded up against his throat. Nerves hit his system with a vengeance.

“Please lie down on your stomach, face in the headrest, thank you,” a female doctor said.

His arms laid by his side, palms sweating like mad. His cast felt soaked through. The tile floor was white and gray speckled. Billy began counting the dots to calm his thoughts. His face rested against the circular rest and felt as his hair was tied up and covered.

“We’ll first sanitize, Billy.” A cold cotton ball swiped along the base of his neck. “Now you’ll feel a few pinches.” And he did, four or five needle pokes with numbing solution. Tears pooled in his eyes against his will. They dripped to the tiles below. Billy closed his eyes tightly, breathing deeply as instructed when they started.

Another doctor fussed to his left, metal clanking and a small cart rolling into Billy’s peripheral. The wheels were all he could see, white rimmed and sterile.

“Now, Billy, you should feel a little pressure but no pain. Let us know if you feel anything,” a male doctor to his right said.

“Okay,” his voice sounded scared and wet. He sounded younger than he was.

He knew they were cutting him, but it only felt like fingers pressing to his neck. Imagining the blade going into him didn’t help. Thinking instead of a life being placed into him didn’t help either. A few more tears dripped to the floor. His hands curled at his sides, his wrist hurt.

“Good job, Billy.” The scalpel clattered onto the tray with a soft noise. The same voice murmured to another doctor, “Please open the vessel; are we ready?” Voices responded affirmative and Billy took a shaking breath in. “Are we ready, Billy?”

He sniffed, snot rolling back into his throat. He swallowed. He

pretended to braver than he was, “Yeah, yeah, we are.”

It went quiet then. Clacking on the tray, snaps letting go on the vessel, Billy knew. He'd seen a picture of one when he was kid, rounded and silver. It was the most futuristic thing he'd seen at the time. It glowed and was said to be warm to the touch. Looking at one inspired certain emotions for different people. Billy had felt mostly awe. A person was in there. Well, almost a person.

There was sigh to his right, and he felt the fingers of one of the doctors opening the incision on his neck. The scar would be about 2 inches long, would be reopened when retraction day came. Billy would have it for the rest of his life. Thankfully he'd grown out a mullet in the past couple of years.

A warmth radiated across his neck and this was it. There was no going back now. He was about to connect consciousness with an alien life. More tears flooded his eyes and he tightened his whole body, pressing himself down and as small as he could get. Fear spiked everywhere within him.

It was in him now. He could feel it grasping at his spine, slithering under his skin up his neck. The base of his skull warmed. Sweat broke out all over his body. He barely heard the female doctor say, “We're stitching you up now, Billy.”

He couldn't help the sob that sprung from his chest. It didn't feel right. Get it out, he wanted to shout to get it out of him. Where was Joyce? Can she tell them to take it out, please? It was too warm and wrong wrong *wrong*.

Something flicked in his vision, something shuddered behind his ears. Something was waking up in him. There was more to him now.

“Alright, Billy. Can you please sit up for us?” His body moved on autopilot, tears slipping down his face and snot pooling on his top lip. The leather and paper beneath him stuck to his skin. It crinkled and squeaked around him. This stirred a questioning feeling in his gut. It wasn't him though, separate emotions from his own.

His feet dangled off the table and he felt young and lost once more.

All the doctors were in front of him. Billy's fear dipped again. He'd never been looked at this closely before.

"Hello, can you hear us?" this wasn't directed to Billy himself. It was for the Shareen in him. The stirring grew, his vision blurred; it felt like he was waking up. Groggy and new.

*Hello?* came a delicate voice within.



## 2. Chapter 2

Billy felt kind of numb while signing off paperwork with Joyce in the lobby. The procedure had only taken thirty minutes. It had felt like hours. The Shareen in him had grown quiet afterward, only present enough for Billy to nod to the doctors that he was there. He was just listening now, it's okay. Joyce explained that sometimes it took them a while to "get online." That sometimes they just watched and grew connected to their Host. If Billy didn't hear from him in two days, please contact her immediately. She gave him a folder of information, some for just community service hours, some specifically for Hosting. All of it was worded to sound like nothing more than giving his time to Joyce's cause. All of it he could show Neil without him knowing the truth.

Another questioning feeling bloomed in his gut. Billy didn't know what caused it. Was it Neil? Was it the secret? Was it talking with Joyce? Was it at the numbness that permeated his whole body? He wouldn't know until the Shareen had enough energy to communicate with him. Until he knew enough of the language to speak what he was only projecting right now.

"What do—" Billy cut himself off, overwhelmed by the feeling of wonder that spread across his chest when he started to talk. The Shareen hadn't heard his voice yet and hearing it caused innocent happiness. He put a steadying hand on the armrest of his chair.

"Yes, Billy?"

He took a deep breath. "What do people usually do first?"

"Oh, first?" Joyce tapped her pen against the clipboard with all his signed paperwork. "Well, show them where they live, rest for a few days, help ground their Shareen."

Nodding as she spoke, Billy muttered, "Okay, I can do that." He was sure that he was going to be suspended from the school anyway. He had nothing better to do.

Joyce smiled at him and her voice was soft, "Your Shareen is

unnamed, Billy. I think a good first bonding exercise would be to help him find a name.”

“Find a name?” He felt the question echo somewhere in his brain. Another warmth spread within him. He couldn’t help the small smile. He wasn’t even sure he was the one to cause it.

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Susan picked him up at noon. She didn’t ask how the court meeting went but had packed him a small lunch for the drive back to Hawkins. It was about an hour back to the house. The peanut butter sandwich stuck to the roof of his mouth and the can of Coke was lukewarm. It was like a gourmet meal to the Shareen. Billy could feel the giddiness deep in his gut, unlike anything he’d ever felt in his life. He fought to keep his face neutral.

The stitches on his neck were already sore. They’d given him a numbing ointment that he could apply before bed to help. They scheduled a checkup for the stitches for couple weeks out, during a meeting with Joyce. Billy wished they were already out, didn’t like how they stood out against his neck. It wouldn’t be long before some punk at school noticed and word got around.

Billy found himself looking out the window, arms crossed over his chest after finishing the sandwich. Farmland flashed by, only broken up by the occasional farmhouse and a line of trees. Most of the surrounding area to Hawkins was no-man’s land. The Hawkins police department had shipped his case off to the neighboring city, larger than itself, with a proper court house and cells to house him. The cop he had beat up had been a State boy, which added insult to injury.

A breath warmed against the backside of his ear. A gasp when cows rolled by. They were grazing, brown and white and black and completely normal. There was a question there, an amazement at something new and unexplored.

Cows, Billy thought to the Shareen. It echoed in him, clipped to the saved memory of the beasts in the field, which repeated until Billy got a headache. He rubbed at his temple.

"The school called this morning," Susan said finally. The ride had been silent so far. The radio was dialed all the way down, windows cranked up.

"Oh?"

One thing Billy liked about Susan is she didn't beat around the bush with him. "You've been suspended for a week." This was lenient for the school. "You're not allowed to play basketball for the season." Not that he could have anyway. "And you have after school detention for two more weeks when you return." In all, it could have been worse. Neil wouldn't be pleased, but Billy could go off during the day and do fuck-all he wanted.

He hummed a response to Susan. She hesitated before speaking again. Town was coming up soon. Trees thickened around them and the welcome sign was in sight. They'd be home in ten minutes. "Your father is at work. He'll be back for dinner." Billy took it for what it was, 'You're safe until dinner.' If he could spare the Shareen that for a few hours, he would. Maybe he should—

"Susan?"

"Yeah?" They turned down a suburb.

Someone had to know. Did Billy trust her enough? Someone to help him keep it from Neil. He leaned an elbow against the door, fingers playing against his lip. "I'm Hosting." It came out quiet, hand covering part of his mouth and he looked straight ahead as he said it. The house was coming up.

"Oh." The car slowed a little. Her hands tightened on the wheel. Billy didn't need to look over to know her eyes were on his face. "Hello." There was fear in her voice. She was scared for them, him and the Shareen he carried.

"He's just watching right now. They said that's normal."

"Okay," she took a deep breath, turned back to the neighborhood, and turned into the driveway. The car rolled to a stop. All the windows were dark. They were safe until dinner. "Okay, sweetheart.

Let me know if you need anything.”

That made Billy pause. “Do you still have that naming book?” Her and Neil had tried for a third a few years back, when they were in California still.

“Yeah, I do.”

\*

Billy spent the majority of the day in bed. He could feel the Shareen categorizing all the senses that they felt. The quietness of the house. Susan was in the kitchen, in the living room, outside in the gardens. She softly sung to herself like she only did when Neil wasn't home. The softness of his sheets against his skin. Cotton cool against his chest and cheek, warming as Billy stayed in the same position. The swirling black and orange of the back of Billy's eyelids. How Billy would blink the world into view occasionally. There was a moment of lost identity in his chest. Who was he?

“I'm Billy.” It felt silly to whisper it to wall of his bedroom.

He didn't expect a response and didn't get one. Sighing, he rolled onto his back, his uninjured arm flung over his head. The back of his skull felt pressured, thoughts that weren't his own pressing against his. The headache persisted. None of the thoughts reached out to him, stayed quiet but watchful. The Shareen didn't know what to expect, Billy was sure. A small bedroom with a single bed and cardboard boxes probably wasn't it. An asshole that had a run in with the cops and a messed up family definitely wasn't the standard Host. It wouldn't be in whatever handbook they gave the Shareen when they signed up to join Earth.

“Take your time, princess, no rush,” Billy muttered. It was this side of unkind, annoyed to feel a little like an idiot in the face of utter silence.

There was no response. Not even a flicker of emotion.

\*

Max came home shortly after four o'clock after an hour at the arcade

with her nerd friends. Billy heard the door slam closed and her backpack hit the wall as she flung it off. She shouted for Susan loudly, tromping to the kitchen.

*Max*, he thought pointedly. *Step sister*.

He swear he felt a hum somewhere in his head.

Neil would be home shortly after 4:30. He should get up then. Feet hitting the carpet, Billy took a deep breath. With any luck, the injuries he had would be enough to sway Neil not to do anything today. He made his way to help Susan set the table for dinner.

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Billy was lucky. Neil barely paid him any attention over dinner. They ate tuna casserole in relative silence. Tones of disgust rolled from the back of his mind at the casserole. The Shareen wasn't a fan. Billy didn't care one way or another, but took an extra helping of carrots to appease him. Those he at least could stand.

"—and mom, you'll never guess what they added to the arcade!" Max said after a large bite of casserole.

"What's that, hon?" Susan didn't know much about cabinet games but faked it well. She wrote down all the games Max talked about and kept it in her bedside table.

"Dig Dug!" Max grinned wide, oblivious to the tension around the table. Or willfully ignoring it. Billy wishes he could do that same.

"Oh! You love that one!" And she did. She wouldn't shut up about it in California and how this arcade didn't have it.

Billy was thankful for the mindless conversation, finished his meal quietly. Tried not to share with Shareen all the mixed emotions he was feeling. It wasn't that he projected happy thoughts per se, but avoided the absolute terror that gripped his throat. He knew he wasn't successful when small alarm bells sounded deep in him, not his own. Just the Shareen not knowing the emotion and panicking at Billy's expense. A resounding noise of 'what is happening?' flowed through him.

*Nothing, I'm fine.*

A response almost formed. He felt it on his own tongue. Billy took a quick drink of water, eyed Neil to his right, pushing the warning inside trying to say an explanation without words. He waited for permission to leave the table. None of them could get up until Neil did. The feeling of response died off his tongue. Something pulled away from behind his eyes.

He would do what he needed to keep the Shareen away from this family.

When Billy slipped into his room an hour later, he found the naming book under his pillow. It was small but thick. There were dog-eared pages. When Billy flicked through, names were highlighted or underlined. He could imagine Susan smiling over different names while alone.

They'd work on name picking once the Shareen could speak. For now Billy just flicked through the pages, taking note of this name or that. He placed a few folds in the edges for himself, feeling nostalgic for something he's never known.

Before laying down for the night, Billy rubbed ointment onto his stitches, staring at the walls in front of him. Band posters and pin-up girls stared back. The Shareen's curiosity at them both was equal, not fazed by the half-naked women in the least. To him it seemed to just be something he didn't fully understand, but desperately wanted to. Billy could feel the bubbling urge to learn, something he had used to know. Still the Shareen said nothing.

He slipped into a dreamless sleep at 9:43pm. There was a warmth under his ribcage.

\*

Billy read the naming book for two more nights with no response. There was never a good time to call Joyce about him not saying anything yet; Neil or Max were always home.

He showered the next night after getting home. The water was warming as he undressed, trying not to see the damage in the mirror.

Yanking the tshirt off proved difficult with the cast and the large bruising on his left ribcage. The doctors couldn't do anything for his broken ribs and Billy winces at the deep purple and black bruising that covered it. And once he started looking, it was like he couldn't stop. Standing stock still, Billy looked at himself. He felt paralyzed by how his body looked, motionless and curious. Took in the greasy hair, the cuts along his cheeks and his lower lip. His chest was broad, slimming at his hips and mostly unharmed. He was paler than he'd like, unused to seasons beyond summer.

The question was more of a bubbling in his throat.

"I'm Billy," he whispered underneath the spray of the shower, watched as the mirror fogged around him. That warmth in his chest returned.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

thank you for the response on the first chapter!

### **Author's Note:**

one of those personal plots that I thought about for months on end and never wrote until I did. let me know what you think!